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DR. RALPH M. HOLDEMAN--EVANGELIST, ARTIST, SCULPTOR

BY JOHN R. KNECHT

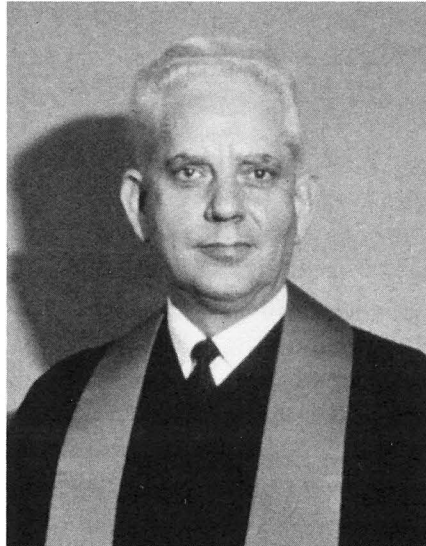
Ralph Holdeman served as the Executive Secretary of Evangelism of the Evangelical United Brethren Church from 1954 to 1962. Ralph was an unashamed evangelist. He believed the Gospel story and that it is indeed good news: that this good news of God's love and forgiveness is to be shared with all of God's children; that once you have experienced God's grace in Jesus Christ you will want to share that experience; that you will not be able to keep silent. You will be a witness, an evangelist.

Ralph was born May 8, 1906, in New Paris, Indiana, to parents who had been shunned from their Mennonite church because of the early arrival of their first child—Ralph's older brother. Although they had decided, as Ralph put it, "To go to hell together," and not be a part of any church, they sometimes attended Grace Evangelical Church in New Paris where Ralph and his siblings attended Sunday school. It was through the influence of Ralph's Sunday school teacher, Mrs. Charles Rohrer and her gentle touch upon his shoulder during the altar call at a revival service that Ralph responded when he was sixteen years old.

Although he prayed at the altar rail until the pastor advised him to go home to bed, it was not until he was praying by his bed at home that he felt he was saved. This occurred despite the heckling from his brother who said, "I don't see any wings coming out yet." Within six weeks his brother became a Christian and Ralph's mother followed a month later. His other siblings also professed Christ as the months went by and finally, many months later, his father did as well.

At another revival service when Ralph was eighteen, his pastor Rev. Ralph Handschu urged Ralph to seek entire sanctification—a doctrine of the

Evangelical Church. He responded to this invitation and reported a joyous experience. Rev. Handschu began suggesting that young Ralph consider the ministry. Ralph received a scholarship to attend an ecumenical assembly emphasizing Christian vocations held at Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. One of the featured speakers took Ralph aside and also counseled him to think of the ministry. There was one problem, however, Ralph stuttered. He shared this concern with the speaker but the speaker assured him, "God will take care of that."



DR. HOLDEMAN

Shortly after the Lake Geneva experience, Rev. Handschu arranged to have Ralph preach his first sermon during a Sunday evening service at his home church. The church was full because Rev. Handschu had persuaded several neighboring churches to attend and had publicized the event throughout the town. Ralph was apprehensive and "quarreled" with God about what might happen if he stuttered and people laughed at him. He preached, as he put it, a simple ten-minute sermon using Galatians 6:17 as the text—"From henceforth let no

man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." After the service his best friend, George Cripe, said to Ralph, "I wish I knew Jesus Christ like you do." Later that evening after much talk and prayer, George accepted Christ as his Savior. Ralph treasured that experience throughout his ministry.

Ralph Holdeman began his college work at nearby Goshen College. One of his professors, Art Sprenger, noted Ralph's artistic ability and helped him to hone his skills in the campus publication, *The Maple Leaf*. Toward the end of his second year at

Goshen, Rev. Handschu told Ralph that if he wanted to be a minister in the Evangelical Church, he should go to a college sponsored by the denomination. Thus Ralph transferred to North Central College, Naperville, Illinois, where he completed his degree. Ralph's artistic interests continued to develop and he created charcoal and pastel portraits of professors at the college and at Evangelical Theological Seminary—located on the campus of North Central College.

Ralph's German professor, Thomas Finkbeiner, exerted a major influence in Ralph's life. Prof. Finkbeiner, who served as a lay pastor at the Big Woods Congregational Church in Warrenville, Illinois, encouraged Ralph to become the student pastor of the church and "sold" the congregation on the idea. Ralph learned much from the people of this congregation during his two years there. He was impressed in particular with Henry and Abbie Bartholomew and many years later Ralph produced a film titled "Workers Together with God." The farm couple in this film was patterned after Henry and Abbie.

After completing his college degree, Ralph enrolled in Evangelical Theological Seminary. Upon his graduation in 1932 he was assigned to Trinity Evangelical Church in Louisville, Kentucky as pastor. On January 1, 1933, Ralph married Mildred Christman of Goshen whom he had courted during his college and seminary years. Early in their marriage they adopted Margaret Rose, who was the light of their life. Ralph served Trinity Church effectively for nine years. During these years he became an early leader in the civil rights movement by seeking to make Trinity an integrated church. One-third of the members of the Sunday school was African-American and three African-American families became members of the church. Ralph worked with several like-minded ministers in integrating the Brown Hotel, several department stores, as well as the buses and streetcars.

Another challenge to his ministry in Louisville came with the 1937 Ohio River flood. One hundred two of his 148 members suffered flood damage to their homes. Ralph and Mildred were not exempt although their house was on relatively high ground. Thirty inches of water covered the first floor. The Holdemans moved to the second floor and took eleven people, including their elderly Roman Catholic neighbors, into their home. The bishops of the Evangelical Church made a church-wide appeal

for flood disaster relief funds and channeled more than \$2 million to Louisville where Ralph administered and distributed the funds to those who had suffered property and personal loss. A committee assisted him in this effort and his district superintendent, Dr. Reuben H. Mueller, came to Louisville to assist in the cleanup and to oversee the final distribution of the relief funds. Ralph always believed that from this shared experience Reuben Mueller became his champion.

Another interesting outgrowth of his Louisville years was the formation of the Ecclesiastical Art Press. Ralph began designing artwork for his Sunday bulletins and shared some of his work with other pastors. A number of them asked if they could buy bulletins for their church from Ralph. Starting with mimeograph, then multigraph, and then multilith Ralph set up a bulletin printing service in the parsonage. A layman in the church provided him with a press and ultimately he and Mildred were shipping 110,000 bulletins each week before the denomination began providing weekly bulletin services.

In 1941 Ralph was assigned to Bethel Church in Elkhart, Indiana. One of his first tasks was the building of a new parsonage. The design that he and Mildred laid out was the subject of some controversy because they planned enough space in the home to entertain the superintendents and general church dignitaries. Ralph planned a conference on Evangelism, inviting all four Evangelical bishops and secretaries of evangelism from annual conferences across the denomination.

When Rueben Mueller was elected General Secretary of Christian Education and Evangelism in 1945, he invited Ralph to become his assistant. This involved moving to Cleveland and making numerous trips between Cleveland and Dayton in preparation for merger with the United Brethren denomination the following year. Both Mueller and O. T. Deever (his UB counterpart) believed that Christian education and evangelism belonged together. Ralph's position in the new joint board was Director of Church School Administration and Audiovisuals. Immediately he set about updating the literature related to his field and in preparing turnover ("flip") charts. One of these was titled "Blueprints" and another "Strengthening the Sunday School Program." Ralph believed in careful and systematic planning and these traits were represented in the charts. They also gave him an outlet for his artistic ability.

Ralph also became part of an ecumenical team that included Guy Black and Dawson Bryan. This team developed audiovisuals produced by the Jam Handy Organization in Detroit. In the process Ralph was exposed to the production of filmstrips and motion pictures. Eventually, in cooperation with Family Films, he produced the motion picture "Workers Together with God" mentioned earlier. The film demonstrated the efforts of one family to be witnesses for Christ in their daily life and work. Ralph wrote the script. It attempted to illustrate all forms of evangelism. At \$59,000 some persons considered the film too costly.

When Dr. Mueller was elected bishop at the 1954 EUB General Conference speculation centered on whether Ralph Holdeman would succeed Dr. Mueller as Secretary of the Board of Christian Education or would succeed Dr. Deeever as Secretary of the Board of Evangelism. [By this time the boards had been separated.] The General Conference elected E. Craig Brandenburg to succeed Bishop Mueller and elected Ralph to succeed Dr. Deeever. In April 1955 Ralph nominated me to the Board of Evangelism as his assistant. Ralph was a great mentor and I learned much from him during the seven and a half years I worked with him in this position. Another key person in the Board was Miss Lois Pottle who served as the administrative assistant and office manager for the board during those years (and following). No praise can be too high for her work with us. She was a devoted servant of Christ and the Church. Programs to encourage the formation of small groups for Bible study, for sharing one's faith, for listening to one another's faith journey, and for reaching out to persons outside the church were initiated.

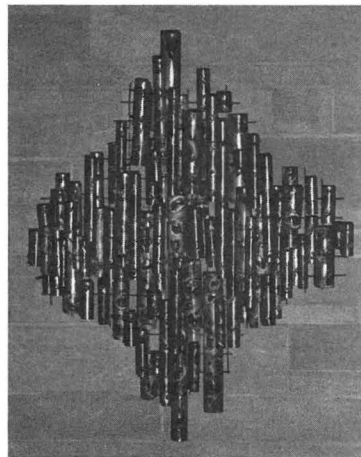
Perhaps the most significant contribution was made in the Youth Evangelism Service (Y.E.S.) program, begun in 1957 as an outgrowth of the youth missions to youth program of these two general boards held during the summers of 1956 and 1957. The Y.E.S. program began with four young men and eventually included thirty-six young men over six years. They worked with local churches, usually in teams of two, and oftentimes in community-wide meetings in larger teams. The Y.E.S. men were usually seminary students serving a year's internship with the Board. They were unusually effective in leading other youth to Christ.

Ralph also placed a renewed emphasis on strong boards of evangelism at the annual conference level. We conducted workshops and seminars across

the church. We stressed careful planning and preparation in public evangelistic meetings and the training of lay persons in visitation evangelism. Ralph's artistic ability continued to make a great contribution in the various denominational periodicals. He created the symbols for the boards of Christian Education, Evangelism, and Pensions. He designed the E.U.B. road sign with the Trinitarian seal and the cross in enameled yellow and black.

Shortly after the 1962 General Conference in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where he had been elected to a third four-year term, Ralph was invited to become the part-time director of the Department of Evangelism of the National Council of Churches in New York City. This was a particularly attractive opportunity for Ralph because his daughter, Margaret Rose, was living in New York pursuing operatic

voice training. But primarily Ralph saw this appointment as an opportunity to take his ideas and dreams for evangelism to a larger ecumenical audience. He accepted the position and within a year or so the part-time designation was dropped and Ralph became the Director of Evangelism for the N.C.C.



UNITED IN DOXOLOGY
metal sculpture at UTS

Ralph joined the N.C.C. during a period of internal struggle for leadership of the organization. Furthermore, the N.C.C. faced many critics from outside the organization. Ralph experienced a significant amount of frustration in attempting to enact the vibrant evangelism program he had envisioned. There were victories and joys, but many of these were related to his artistic contributions. Several pieces of his sculpture and art occupy important places in the National Council Chapel and the N.C. C. offices in New York.

In 1970 Ralph decided to return to his Indiana roots. He approached Bishop Mueller about the possibility of a part-time pastorate in a small church where he could devote significant time to his artistic endeavors. He was assigned to Albright Church in Elkhart, Indiana. This was a difficult assignment inasmuch as the former pastor had withdrawn from

the EUB denomination taking about half the congregation with him to form an independent Baptist church. This pastor had attacked the N.C.C. as communist and now came Ralph, fresh from the N.C.C., as the new pastor.

But Ralph served the Albright Church for fifteen years, supposedly on a half-time basis. But those who knew Ralph are aware that he never did anything by "halves." The church experienced growth and healing during his ministry. And his "Redemption Sculpture" also grew. He built a studio in Elkhart and used scrap metal from the Conn musical instrument company to fashion a variety of religious symbols now found from coast to coast. The exhibit that he probably treasured most is one of the Ten Commandments that occupies a central place in the First Wayne United Methodist Church in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

The word "retirement" was not part of Ralph's vocabulary. He was 79 when he relinquished the pastorate of Albright Church, but he continued to produce beautiful and meaningful religious sculptures until his death on July 31, 1990. I am sure that many of you, who like me, were privileged to know Ralph, rise up to call him blessed and to thank God for his life and ministry!

AUTHORS OF THIS ISSUE

John R. Knecht served as President of UTS from 1965-1985. A member of the EUB Center's Advisory Board, Dr. Knecht and his wife Marjorie live in North Manchester, Indiana.

Dwight S. Busacca is a retired EUB clergyman and a staff member of the Board of Global Ministries for 25 years. He is a member of the Center's Advisory Board and currently resides at Otterbein Home-Lebanon.

Robert P. Longenecker is a 1954 graduate of UTS and a retired clergyman living in Philadelphia.

Robert L. Frey is the editor of the *Telescope-Messenger*.

FOR ELECTRONIC ACCESS TO THE CENTER

Website: <www.united.edu/eubcenter>

Email: <eubcenter@united.edu>

Fax: 937-275-5701 **Phone:** 937-278-5817

Director email: <jnelson@united.edu>

Editor email: <rlfrey@myexel.com>

Miss Geneva Harper: Christian Worker

By Robert L. Frey

Most of the information for this article came from the family of Miss Geneva Harper, especially Vincent Merritt, her nephew. Unless otherwise noted, the quotations below are from newspaper stories that reported on a program commemorating her life and from her obituary.

Throughout the history of the United Brethren, the Evangelical, and the Evangelical United Brethren denominations many women served crucial roles in the life of the church. Although the United Brethren denomination led in the recognition of women as ministers and explicitly provided for their ordination at the 1889 General Conference, the Evangelical Church resisted such a step. As a result of opposition from some of the Evangelical leaders, the ordination of women was not mentioned in the 1946 union creating the EUB Church.

Despite the difficulties women found in being accepted as ministers, they were active as missionaries, teachers, and local church leaders. In these areas they were clearly leaders and their work was most impressive. Their influence on young people and fellow Christians was often remarkable indeed.

Recently, a college friend of mine, Marilyn Merritt Walrich, called my attention to one of these women—Geneva Harper of Saybrook, Illinois. Miss Harper possessed college and a seminary diploma, but she never served a church as a pastor. Her plan to be a missionary was thwarted by health problems and she eventually returned to her hometown and lived there the remainder of her life in the house where she was born.

Geneva Harper was born on February 13, 1889. She was the daughter of pioneer settlers of Saybrook a town of less than 1,000 residents situated in east-central Illinois about thirty miles east of Bloomington.

Geneva Harper's parents were instrumental in establishing the United Brethren church in Saybrook. Miss Harper was reared in this church and during her young adult years developed a strong commitment to a Christian career. She began teaching Sunday school during her sophomore year in high school. After graduation from Saybrook Community High School, she entered Illinois Wesleyan University in

nearby Bloomington where several other members of her family graduated eventually.

After one year at Illinois Wesleyan, Geneva Harper transferred to Otterbein College in Westerville, Ohio. Exactly why she made this move is not clear. If she was considering a career as a United Brethren minister or missionary, however, there were advantages in attending a United Brethren college—and Otterbein was the best known UB college in Illinois despite the fact that Indiana Central University in Indianapolis had been established several years earlier.

After completing her college degree at Otterbein, Geneva Harper enrolled at Bonebrake Seminary (now United Theological Seminary) in Dayton, Ohio. Here she completed the Deaconess course with diploma in 1911. During her studies at Bonebrake she developed an interest in serving as a missionary and possibly as an ordained minister, but she did not pursue either direction at that time.

Geneva Harper returned to Illinois and from 1914 to 1923 taught English at several Illinois schools—Corn Valley and Four Corner county schools near Saybrook, Colfax High School, and Morrison schools. In the early 1920s she felt a renewed call to enter Christian service as a missionary and was assigned to Puerto Rico. She spent only one year (1923-24) in the mission field, however, because the heat and high humidity created health problems for her. She returned to Illinois and was employed as a teacher once again.

But Geneva Harper's experience in Puerto Rico had a significant influence on her. She had a chance to live in an unfamiliar culture and to enjoy the satisfaction of providing Christian ministry to the people of Puerto Rico. For the remainder of her life she often talked about her experiences in Puerto Rico. Had health problems not hindered her, the remainder of Miss Harper's life might have been quite different.

But in 1926 Geneva Harper returned to Saybrook Community School where she taught English and served as a counselor until her retirement in 1949. She was remembered as a kind, but strict teacher who had few disciplinary problems. The 1947 yearbook at Saybrook Community School was dedicated to her with the words, "In appreciation of your inspiring spirit of helpfulness, your sympathetic understanding of and interest in our individual problems. Your intense interest in young people that led you to annually open your heart to all new and returning students, we dedicate the 1947 *Totem*."

Even after her retirement students came to Miss Harper for tutoring in English literature. Said one of these students: "She [Miss Harper] possesses an unusual talent for making difficult literature understandable to students, and it is for this help many of them seek." Other students testified to Geneva Harper's encouragement and affirmation of young people. Known by more than family members as "Aunt Neve," she was influential in guiding a number of young people into the Christian ministry.

During her teaching career and during retirement Geneva Harper was extremely active in the church. Her nephew Vincent Merritt said: "Aunt 'Neve' did everything in the Saybrook U.B. Church but sweep out the sanctuary—and she probably volunteered for that. She was in the church choir, sang at weddings and funerals with my Mother, wrote Sunday School plays, taught Sunday school for fifty years, wrote sermons, helped write . . . a book . . . on Church Finance [for the Illinois Conference], wrote numerous papers on missionary work in the Church, was known statewide, and held various offices in the Women's Society of World Service."

Geneva Harper's statewide recognition culminated with a "Miss Harper Day" at the Thirteenth Convention of the WSWS held in Elgin on April 1967. The tributes given to her that day showed clearly her influence on the work of the WSWS.

A year earlier, in October of 1966 the people of Miss Harper's hometown and the surrounding area recognized her with a surprise program. The format of the program was based on a popular television program of the day titled, "This Is Your Life." During the final hymn of the Sunday evening worship service friends and relatives who had gathered at the Methodist Church several blocks away began to file into the EUB church.

Miss Harper, puzzled by the gathering of more than 500 people who filled every nook and cranny of the church, was even more surprised when her minister, Rev. C. Don Ferrill, announced, "Miss Harper, this is your life." But she soon adjusted to the surprise and showed her wit at several points during the program. Seldom at a loss for words, Miss Harper had to be interrupted several times to keep the program moving. At one point she told Rev. Ferrill, "You can always tell a teacher, but you can't tell 'em much."

Part of the evening involved presenting a variety of gifts to Miss Harper. Before she was

presented a water heater, Rev. Ferrill asked, "What appliance have you never had in your house that you could really use?" "A husband," replied Miss Harper.

The stream of guests who attended this program testified repeatedly to Miss Harper's positive influence in their lives. Some were relatives others were church leaders such as Dr. O. F. Landis, then a conference superintendent but earlier a pastor of Miss Harper's in Saybrook. Dr. Landis credited Geneva Harper with making him a better minister. The overall message of the evening, however, was clear. Here, in Miss Geneva Harper, was a woman who had been a major Christian influence in this small rural community. Friends, relatives, and many former students had all come to let Geneva Harper know that this little corner of the world was a better place as a result of her living there. Several years later, on June 11, 1970, Geneva Harper died.

Geneva Harper's story is interesting and inspiring. It probably reminds each of us of similar Christian women in our lives whose dedication and saintly lives have been a significant influence on us. It also reminds us of many women whose desire to be a minister was thwarted in an age when women were seldom welcome in the pulpit. Despite the action of the 1889 United Brethren General Conference it was to be more than sixty years before women began to be widely accepted as ministers. Fortunately, in the meantime most of these women were able to find other avenues for their talents—often as teachers or missionaries. We have all been blessed by their lives.

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1810 Harvard Blvd.
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Editor: Robert L. Frey
Compositor: James D. Nelson

Correspondence should be sent to the editor at
1356 Hidden Creek Rd.
Miamisburg, OH 45342

Email: rlfrey@myexcel.com

BISHOP HERMANN W. KAEBNICK: MEMORABLE FRIEND

By Robert P. Longenecker

The plenary session of the 1958 General Conference [of the Evangelical United Brethren Church] that included the stationing of the bishops had just ended. The location—Harrisburg, Pennsylvania just twenty miles from my pastoral appointment—had enabled me to be present and to learn who our new bishop was.



BISHOP KAEBNICK

It had been a long session and now the restroom was crowded and in that crowd was none other than my new bishop, Hermann Walter Kaebnick. As he came in my direction I stuck out my hand to welcome him, telling him I was pleased to have him as my new bishop. He asked me where I was stationed and his eyes lighted up

when I said, "Myerstown, Pennsylvania."

It was obvious that the former Evangelical Church Center [at Myerstown] was of special interest to him and I lost no time in inviting him to come and to preach for our Annual Homecoming Sunday the following spring. "Send me a letter with details. I think it will work out just fine," he said.

I followed through on the bishop's request and in a short time received a reply confirming the date and time, April 26, 1959 at 10:15 a.m. For that afternoon's Sunday school and Youth Rally I was also fortunate to schedule Dr. Raymond Veh, editor of our youth magazine, *Builders*, as speaker. This was my first Homecoming Day at Myerstown and I was on "Cloud Nine." The congregation marveled at my double coup!

The big day finally arrived and Bishop Kaebnick preached on the theme: "How Much Do You Care for The Church?" (I Cor. 11:22b). The closing hymn was "I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord." Dinner at the parsonage next door followed the service. The Bishop, a widower, was accompanied by his daughter Winifred and we had a wonderful time. Thus far everything had gone letter perfect.

Bishop Kaebnick was eager to see the former Albright College campus, in 1958 the headquarters of the Evangelical Congregational Church and its School of Theology. *[Editor's Note. The Evangelical Congregational Church was created when the Evangelical Association and the United Evangelical Church merged in 1922. A minority of United Evangelicals in the East Pennsylvania Conference, plus a few churches in Ohio and Illinois declined to join the union and eventually created the Evangelical Congregational Church.]* The creation of the Evangelical Congregational Church represented a painful split and it was clear that Bishop Kaebnick had some hope for a reunion one day.

Bishop Kaebnick and I talked much as I drove him around town. My mind was also on the two o'clock schedule I needed to keep back at the church. THEN IT HAPPENED!

I was crossing a street and did not see a car coming directly toward the side of the car where Bishop Kaebnick was seated. Brakes screamed! Although both cars were moving at a modest speed, a collision could not be avoided. All of us were shaken with some cuts and bruises and a great deal of embarrassment for me.

There was the necessary police form, the exchange of insurance details, addresses and telephone numbers, AND the two o'clock obligation back at the church. I am less than clear as to how we all got there, but when we arrived there was music. Dr. Veh and a visiting quartet had already arrived. Fortunately, thoughtful lay members had sprung into action in my absence.

But the never-to-be-forgotten words of Bishop Kaebnick, as he was about to leave for other duties, left an impression on a young minister. From his coat pocket he took an envelope that our treasurer had given him after the morning service and said: "Brother Longenecker, you will have some expenses due to the collision, I want you to use this to help care for them. Please accept it along with my most cordial thanks for a very meaningful visit with you, your congregation, and your family. God bless you in your continuing ministry and let me know how everything comes out."

This was by no means the end of our relationship. I have two treasured letters from Bishop Kaebnick. He went a second mile and a third, sending me to a ten-day ecumenical seminar at Yale University several years later and beyond that, appointing me pastor of the [Annville] church on the corner of the campus of my *alma mater*, Lebanon Valley College.

In his retirement years he occasionally worshipped with us, visiting one of his close friends,

Dr. William A Wilt, one of my predecessors in the Annville pulpit. The Bishop and I shared the funeral service of Dr. Wilt. I treasure the friendship and encouragement of both these clergy comrades, "of such is the kingdom of God."

OPPORTUNITY PROJECTS

By Dwight S. Busacca

The Advance Special program of the United Methodist Church is known to United Methodists as a way to support specific mission projects, programs, and mission personnel. The term came from the Methodist Church and became a part of the United Methodist Church at the time of merger in 1968.

What is not as well known is that the Evangelical United Brethren Church had a parallel program called "Opportunity Projects." Through this program members and friends of the EUB Church could support missionaries and mission projects.

Dr. Edwin Maynard in his publication, *Mission by Choice* states that EUBs gave about "\$800,000 a year for missionary support and about \$500,000 a year for capital expenditures" to various mission fields such as "Sierra Leone, Nigeria, China, Brazil, Red Bird [in Kentucky], McCurdy [in New Mexico], and other mission fields."

Three staff members of the Board of Missions assigned to specific geographical areas cultivated funds to support EUB mission personnel and projects. Parker Young worked in the Eastern part of the United States, Charles Bartsch in the Western States, and Vernon Farnham followed by Dwight Busacca in the Midwest.

The idea of having regional personnel located in different parts of the country was inaugurated by Dr. John Schaefer, the chief officer of the Board of Missions. Lois Miller was the staff executive who headed the Opportunity Projects program.

Each year a folder was printed that listed the various "Opportunity Projects" available for support. The three field offices had the names of missionaries who were available for support by congregations in that geographic area. These offices worked with congregations to select units of support for specific missionaries.

Opportunity Projects was a successful program. It was the EUB effort parallel to the program we know as Advance Specials today.

PRESERVE YOUR EUB TREASURES!
CONTACT US ABOUT
PERMANENT PLACEMENT!

Anecdotalage

The Iowa Conference of the Evangelical United Brethren Church had a campground at Cedar Falls where my wife, Arlene, and I owned a tiny cabin. Our two small girls often preferred to spend some of the summer at the cabin rather than taking a trip to see museums or art galleries. One day, while there, we heard a bird singing a sweet song, and I told our elder daughter, Martha, that it was "an EUB bird." Truly, the song sounded for all the world as if it were saying just that—Eeee-uuu-beee—with the second note more than a third lower than the other two that had the same tone.

Years later Martha, now grown to adulthood and interested in birds, telephoned me long distance to chide me saying: "Dad, the EUB bird is not what you said it was. It's an Eastern Wood Peewee, and it was just saying its name; "Peee-eee-wee." I suppose it would be appropriate now to call it the "UMC bird," but in our family we still—just for the preservation of a wonderful heritage—say it IS an EUB bird.

David Waterman

United Theological Seminary
Center for the Evangelical United Brethren Heritage
1810 Harvard Boulevard
Dayton, OH 45406-4599

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